

# **Fightback**

**Issue #7**  
**2014**

***Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism***



**MANA and resistance  
to the National  
government**

**Why workers need our  
own "foreign policy"  
based on solidarity**

**Fiji Election: Crooks  
in Suits**

**Thousands march  
against climate change**

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## Donations and bequeathments

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*Fightback* magazine is now in its 20th year as we continue the long-term fight for socialism. Readers and supporters may consider remembering us in their will with assets or money that will help the struggle in the long-term. If this is you please put in your will 'Fightback, PO Box 10-282, Dominion Road, Auckland' as well as what you would like to leave to us.

Over the last few months, the mainstream media has run a consistent smear campaign against the MANA Movement. As outlined in Nicky Hager's *Dirty Politics*, media led by the likes of Cameron Slater attack leading progressive leaders in an attempt to demoralise the base. While Hone Harawira has long been treated as a threat, his teaming up with Kim Dotcom offered special opportunities for attack. Although there are legitimate reasons to criticise Kim Dotcom's involvement, as a misogynistic profiteer, we must see mainstream media attacks on Dotcom for what they are; a xenophobic attack on a class traitor who sided with an indigenous fighter.

This brand of attack politics is increasingly displacing critical investigation. As covered elsewhere in this issue (pX-X), backdoor privatisation of public and Maori-owned media is one of a spectrum of tactics that undermine critical journalism. In addition to defending public media, we need a partisan media, one that stands with the oppressed and the fighters against the continued entrenchment of routine brutality.

This is not to say socialists and other progressives should be immune from criticism. There are genuine problems in our movements that need to be addressed. Sometimes the need to defend a 'community' or

organisation itself becomes a problem, if it comes to mean defending abusive behaviour. This is another reason we need our own platforms; our own press, blogs, or own media. We need spaces to sincerely address problems of the left, not to tear comrades down, but to improve our work.

The internet and social media offers unique opportunities. The internet is not a magic fix; problems include surveillance, the digital divide, and self-perpetuating networks. We need engagement in a range of forms, including *kanohi te kanohi* (face to face) and paper publications on the street. However the internet has seen relative media post-scarcity, in terms of content if not necessarily access. In principle, anyone with an internet connection can start a blog or post commentary on social media. Fightback aims to play a positive and critical role in this media ecosystem.

Fightback recently launched Fightback Voices, a blog of discussion documents for our organisation. Any member can submit a discussion document, and these propose courses of action for the organisation as a whole, to be voted on at twice-annual conferences. We also participate in the MANA Movement, including the newly launched MANA News website.

## About Fightback

Under our current system, democracy consists of a vote every 3 years. Most of our lives are lived under dictatorship, the dictatorship of bosses and WINZ case managers. *Fightback* stands for a system in which our workplaces, our schools, our universities are run democratically, for social need rather than private profit.

*Fightback* participates in the MANA Movement, whose stated mission is to bring "rangatiratanga to the poor, the powerless and the dispossessed." Capitalism was imposed in Aotearoa through colonisation, and the fight for indigenous self-determination is intimately connected with the fight for an egalitarian society. We also maintain an independent Marxist organisation outside of parliament, to offer a vision of a world beyond the parliamentary capitalist system.

*Fightback* stands against all forms of oppression. We believe working-class power, the struggle of the majority for self-determination, is the basis for ending all forms of oppression. However, we also recognise that daily inequities such as sexism must be addressed here and now, not just after the revolution.

*Fightback* is embedded in a range of struggles on the ground; including building a fighting trade union movement, movements for gender and sexual liberation, and anti-racism.

*Fightback* also publishes a monthly magazine, and a website, to offer a socialist perspective on ongoing struggles.

*Fightback* stands for struggle, solidarity and socialism.

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Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism

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# MANA Movement

## MANA and resistance to the next National government

*Fightback is committed to the MANA Movement, however we are still in the process of assessing the 2014 electoral defeat and future prospects. Grant Brookes (Fightback/MANA Poneke) offers one perspective.*

Recently MANA leaders Hone Harawira and Annette Sykes toured the country, talking with members and supporters about where next for the Movement after the election.

The media called it a “landslide victory” for National, a “catastrophe” for the opposition. John Key was labelled a “rock star

politician”, said to be “even more popular” than he was three years ago.

National won 61 seats in Parliament – enough to govern alone, based on the provisional count.

The election turnout, at 77 percent, appeared slightly higher than the 74 percent of registered electors who cast a vote in 2011. But fewer people registered to vote this time. So the percentage of the population who voted in 2014 is much the same as in 2011. That was the lowest election turnout since 1887.

Of the 3.4 million eligible voters in New Zealand, just over a million of them wanted three more years of National. But over 2.3 million – 70 percent of the people – didn’t vote for that.

John Key does not have the support of the majority of New Zealanders. And popular opposition to National appears to be solidifying.

There is the potential for resistance, leading to a change of Government in 2017. Where will the resistance come from?

John Key has already outlined his three primary targets for the next National Government: “the economy, reforming the education system and changing the New Zealand flag” (<http://www.3news.co.nz/politics/keys-priorities-economy-education-and-the-flag-2014092209>)

According to the New

Zealand Election Survey, non-voters are predominantly young, poor and Brown. John Key’s talk of focusing on “the economy” is code for helping the rich get richer. The suffering of the million non-voters will increase.

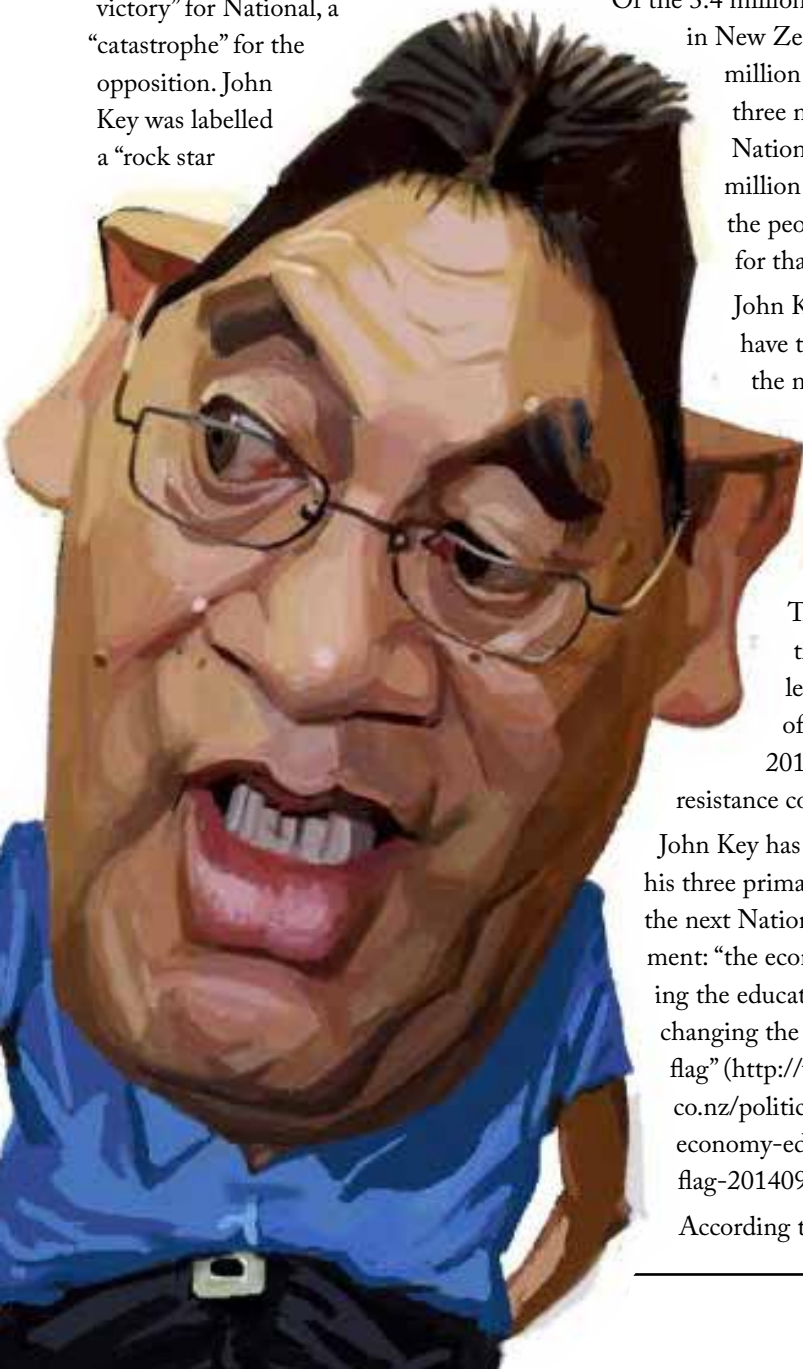
Four years of confrontation over national standards, Novopay, charter schools and executive principals have turned teachers – especially those belonging to the NZEI union – into implacable opponents of this Government. Key’s plan for further “education reform” is a recipe for even greater tension. Lining up ACT pup David Seymour for the associate education portfolio could be one provocation too many.

Key has also signalled “the biggest shake-up of the State Sector so far”. This will mean renewed privatisation and attacks on public sector workers. So teachers could be joined in struggle by other groups – like nurses, who enter negotiations for a new national collective agreement in November.

The coalition deal with the Māori Party will ensure that some of the lucrative fruit carved off the state sector will go to Māori service providers, widening the rift between the favoured few around the tribal elites and the sufferers at the flaxroots.

New anti-union laws set to be rammed through before the end of the year will deepen the divide between the Government and organised workers. Workers could expect to have to fight for their rights after the election, said Council of Trade Unions president Helen Kelly.

Key has also said he expects rapid progress on signing the unpopular Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) after the election. The Petroleum Summit in Auckland next week is expected to announce new offshore oil drilling projects.





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These could also be flash points for opposition. But in reality, this National Government is propped up by a minority of the population which is cocooned from the realities facing wider New Zealand society. The disconnect between the Government and most of the people means that resistance could emerge from just about anywhere.

As a smokescreen for all these unpopular moves, John Key will surf a wave of patriotism around the Gallipoli centenary next year to launch his great distraction – a referendum on the New Zealand flag. On issues like this, even small groups of socialists with clear ideas – like those in Fightback, the International Socialist Organisation and Socialist Aotearoa – can play an important role in stopping the opposition from being side-tracked.

To translate into long-term change, however, the struggles which emerge will need to connect with other streams of resistance. And they will need to articulate viable alternatives, as well as protesting against the Government's agenda. This means that the struggles will need connections back into the political arena.

Three days after the election, MANA leader Hone Harawira wrote to his supporters, "The next three years will be tough, with National continuing to pass laws to make the rich even richer, destroy our environment, attack beneficiaries, and make even more families homeless. On top of that you can expect to see more attacks on Maori as people interpret the win as a license for Maori bashing.

"Unfortunately I don't see anyone in the Opposition having the balls to lead the fight back. Sure there will be 'outrage' and 'condemnation', but after the big talk... nothing."

Labour MPs have already shown they're more interested in scrapping amongst themselves for the top job than in taking the fight to National.

"That's why MANA is so important",

added Hone, "and why you are so important, because unless MANA campaigns for these issues and stands up for those who are vulnerable, the people will suffer."

It was a call for MANA activists to be active in the resistance. This will not only reduce suffering. Visibly identifying with the struggles will allow MANA to publicly voice alternatives, and rebuild public support. The call will be well received. Most of us came to MANA from the Movement, and we are at home there.

But we shouldn't just be resisting National's agenda. MANA members should also represent our kaupapa by working in positive programmes to help the community, from volunteering in school breakfast schemes to teaching free classes in Te Reo Maori. Many of the million non-voters have switched off from "politics" to such an extent that they won't notice our flags on protests and picket lines. But they might notice the MANA t-shirt worn by a volunteer over the counter at the soup kitchen.

Finally, where does this leave the Internet MANA alliance?

When MANA members agreed to a temporary alliance with the Internet Party, lasting until six weeks after the election, we accepted that it was gamble, but one worth taking for the chance to expand our appeal beyond Māori and a radical fringe and to get more MPs. The gamble did not pay off. The election result has badly damaged the public image of the alliance. It could be beyond repair.

If the perspective for MANA over the next three years is to turn "back to

the streets" – joining the resistance and embedding ourselves in our communities – it is unclear how well-equipped the Internet Party is to join us.

Some Internet Party members have already joined MANA, including leading candidates like Roshni Sami and Miriam Pierard. But the party as a whole does not have the same roots or experience in struggle.

Laila Harré has said that the Internet Party will hold a general meeting to consider its future in the next few weeks. She said all options were open – including winding up the party.

If the Internet Party disappears, or decides not to join MANA in returning to the streets, I hope we will welcome any new friends willing to support our kaupapa.



# MANA Movement



## Where next: Reflections on a defeat

*Fightback is committed to the MANA Movement, however there are differences in opinion over the nature of the Internet MANA electoral campaign. Ben Peterson (Fightback/MANA Otautahi) offers one perspective.*

In the wake of the crushing election defeat, the left in Aotearoa, particularly members of the MANA movement needs to take careful lessons. The Internet Party alliance was a gamble, and it did not pay off. Being open about that is important. But recognising failures cannot be used as an excuse to withdraw into sectarian politics and practices.

The IP alliance was an attempt to share MANA's political alternative to new layers of people. MANA's message has a loyal following, but one that is politically isolated from much of the population. The alliance was an attempt to break out of this isolation and to build our movement for change. Unfortunately, this attempt failed. While the vote did slightly increase, and some activists did join Mana who might not have done otherwise, it was not enough. Dotcom was portrayed as a force that discredited MANA's message. While MANA did not water down its politics, the perception was that a 'deal' had been done. This perception combined with the pressure

of the entire political establishment combined to defeat Hone in Te Tai Tokerau, and the movement has lost its seat in parliament.

This is a bitter failure, and it is one that we need to reflect on.

But this cannot be used as an excuse to unnecessarily withdraw. Some socialists will use this as an excuse to turn back to easier fields, such a small campus groups or activist niches. But this leaves us in exactly the same place as we find ourselves after this failed electoral experiment. One road was not successful in reaching new people and building our movement, the other does not even try to. Both roads will fail to build sustained and articulate movements for change.

Learning the lessons from this campaign will mean doing more, not less. It will mean building stronger and politically clearer projects of the left. The mainstream media played a central role in undermining MANA and distorting our message. We need to build our own media projects to fight the battle of ideas and build our pro-people alternatives.

Our pro-people message is best shown when people themselves express it. Building movements and taking to the streets articulates the strength of ordi-

nary people. Activists will have to build stronger organisation in our unions and communities. Building larger organisations engaged in struggle can help to build the audience for radical ideas.

The campaign for InternetMANA did show that this is possible. The attendance generated at the roadshows, and the increase in volunteers willing to work for the movement shows there is a basis for an alternative. In hindsight, it was naive to think that this could be translated into an electoral challenge effectively overnight.

But if we can organise and build on these seeds, organisationally and politically, it can be a stepping stone for struggles in the coming months and years. Socialists need to collectively think about how to respond to these challenges and how we are going to work more effectively together.





Hone pictured at his farewell

## Hone Harawira's farewell speech to Parliament

Ten years ago I led 50,000 Maori on the historic Foreshore and Seabed March from Te Rerenga Wairua to the very steps of this parliament, in a march against the greatest land grab in the history of this country – Labour's theft of the foreshore and seabed – a watershed moment for Maori because it wiped away any illusion that Labour would put Maori rights ahead the interests of big mining; because it showed that the colonial past of land thefts was still very much alive; and because it led to the formation of the first ever independent Maori political party – the Maori Party. Those were the wonderful days when it seemed all of Maoridom spoke with one voice – days that quickly ended when the Maori Party did a deal with National at the next election in 2008,

and although it quickly became clear that we were being overwhelmed, the leadership of the Maori Party ignored my pleas for us to stop accepting National Party lies over the advice of our own experts, and supporting tax cuts for the rich, billion dollar bailouts for failed finance companies, benefit cuts and the privatisation of prisons.

But the final straw came when the Maori Party accepted National's version of the Foreshore and Seabed Bill – the Marine and Coastal Areas Bill – a bill which has seen not one grain of sand returned to Maori in the 5 years since it became law.

That was when I resigned from the Maori Party, resigned from parliament, and with the support of the people of the north and tautoko from around the

country, won the seat back as the leader of the newly minted MANA Movement, and held it again in the election of 2011.

MANA defined its position when we announced that our constituency would be those we call Te Pani Me Te Rawakore, the poor and the dispossessed, and our last three years have been a challenging and vigorous time where we have staked out our place in the political world – a commitment to ending poverty for all and particularly those most vulnerable in our society, our kids; a commitment to putting an end to the grinding homelessness affecting tens of thousands of New Zealand families; a commitment to putting the employment of people ahead of the sacrifice of jobs in the endless pursuit of

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wealth for the few; and a commitment to a future where the Treaty of Waitangi is honoured as the basis for justice and good governance in Aotearoa.

Mind you – being so highly principled brings with it enormous risk, not least the fact that kids can't vote and poor people don't, but I am proud of what we have achieved in our short time in parliament.

When we first raised our Feed the Kids policy three years ago, everybody laughed, so we took our kaupapa on the road, we built a support coalition of more than 30 national organisations, we pushed the policy into the top 5 issues of the year, and with the support of a standout series on Campbell Live, we got a poll last year that showed more than 70% supported a government-funded food in schools programme.

When we called for 10,000 new state houses every year until the housing crisis was over, other politicians squirmed, but after challenging them at a Housing Action protest outside parliament, Labour took up the same call for 10,000 new houses a year, albeit theirs was more a pitch to woo middle-class voters than a bid to help the poor.

We took up the call for full employment because to accept anything less was to accept failure, and by pushing for the minimum wage to be the living wage of \$18.80 an hour, we forced other so-called left-wing parties to follow suit.

We created a space for those of the Ratana faith to meet in parliament, out of respect for T.W. Ratana's commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi, a space that I sincerely hope that Rino Tirikatene and Adrian Rurawhe will honour in my absence, and we also allowed my parliament offices to be used as neutral ground for warring gangs – not exactly parliamentary business but certainly the business of MANA.

And as I leave, I lay down a challenge to this parliament.

My Feed the Kids bill is live in parliament as we speak, a bill which already

has the support of Labour, the Greens, New Zealand First and the Maori Party, a bill to provide what the people of New Zealand have called for – a comprehensive, government-funded food in schools programme. It is ready to be passed at the first sitting of parliament, and if it did, I know it would gladden the hearts of all good Kiwis, please the mums who are struggling to get by, and fill the stomachs of the 100,000 chil-

“ Believe me when I say that MANA will not be going gently into the night.

And as I leave, I thank the thousands of New Zealanders of all creeds and cultures for their fabulous support for me personally, and for their recognition of the work that MANA has done and continues to do as the voice for the voiceless.

dren still going to school hungry every day. This is not my bill. This is a bill for the children. And I call on this parliament to pass it as a show of faith in our own future, and a show of love for those of our children who desperately need our help.

We have a full-blown housing crisis in Aotearoa, with 30,000 families officially listed as homeless – families living in

cars, cowsheds, cockroach-infested caravans and garages, or in cold, damp, overcrowded, unhealthy homes, because rents are too high, and the cost of a new home is out of reach. I call on this parliament to stop the sale of New Zealand homes to non-resident foreigners, to stop the sale of state houses to private developers, to renovate or replace those that need them, and to commit to a full programme of building 10,000 new state houses every year until the housing crisis is over. All it takes to eliminate homelessness and employ thousands of people in the housing industry is political will.

Government also has the responsibility of managing the economy, and just as importantly, ensuring that that economy meets the needs of its people rather than the profits of its parasites, and I call on this parliament to restructure our economy to suit just such a purpose; to invest in community work programmes; to give life back to communities all around our country devastated by asset sales, asset stripping and corporate greed; to create employment for all of its citizens so that instead of wasting billions and billions of dollars every year in needless and mindless welfare dependency, that that money is used to engage communities in rebuilding their future, engage whanau in rebuilding their lives, and engage people in rebuilding their love for work.

And as I leave, I do so in good heart, for over the past couple of weeks I have travelled the MANA nation, and felt the love and the passion that is the lifeblood of MANA, and the commitment to continue our work: from Kaitia to Kaikohe, Whangarei to the North Shore, West Auckland to Southside, Waatea to Waikato, Hamilton to Gisborne, Rotorua to Taihape, Christchurch, and here in Wellington.

Our meetings have not been the sombre and tearful farewell tour for Hone Harawira that others may have hoped for, but rather a joyous and uplifting revival tour for a Movement that takes



up the challenge of being the conscience of the nation, and of taking action in support of our kaupapa.

I hear the mean-spirited and ugly voices of those who are desperately keen to see me go, but I don't have time to respond because we're too busy focussing on the tasks ahead.

We are already organising to Feed the Kids, and working with other groups to get in behind our campaign.

We will be calling on iwi up and down the country to open their marae to house the homeless.

We will be organising Internet Camps for senior students and Maori communities so that our young people can fly the highways of the world.

We are talking with work trusts about Community Employment Programmes that can become a model for other communities to adopt.

We will create Community Hubs where the MANA message of hope and action can become the core of the communities we serve.

We will monitor the government's performance on steps they are taking to create real jobs with decent wages and safe working conditions, to house the homeless, and to eliminate child poverty, and we will also be challenging the opposition to keep the pressure on to achieve these goals.

And we will march against the hated GCSB; we will mount a legal challenge against the mass surveillance that this government is conducting illegally against the people of New Zealand; we will continue to oppose the TPPA that threatens the sovereignty of our very nation; and we will campaign for the return of our assets.

Believe me when I say that MANA will not be going gently into the night.

And as I leave, I thank the thousands of New Zealanders of all creeds and cultures for their fabulous support for me personally, and for their recognition of the work that MANA has done

and continues to do as the voice for the voiceless.

And I leave you all with the words of a National Party voter who wrote to me just two days after the election, who said:

"Hone, I hope you get to read this.

I am a 57 year old pakeha centre right voter (don't throw up just yet) who was delighted with the result of the election, with one exception. That exception is a big one, and one I believe all NZ is poorer for, and that is, you are for the present, no longer in our Parliament.

I have talked about this today with a large number of people who, like me, have had a reasonable amount of success in life, who support the current Government, and would on the surface appear to have little in common with you. The common feeling was that you are an honourable man with a strong and decent vision.

While you made a bad call with your partners for this election, this shouldn't define you, and I and the people I mix with, genuinely hope that after a little time out, you will regroup and then start the next campaign shortly. Good government needs strong opposition and Labour is too factional to provide that, the Greens are too narrowly focused, and the rest are a bloody joke.

I like the fact that with you what one sees is what one gets. At times I wish you would learn to play with others better, but that's you, so what the hell.

I guess what I'm trying to say is that there is a strong feeling out here that NZ needs you; that not only Maori, but all New Zealanders will be missing out, by not having you in our House of Representatives.

I hope out of this you will come back stronger than ever in your own right, without partners with baggage that you don't need. Be your own movement!

Good luck and Stay Strong."

E te whanau – there is a saying that has fed my soul all the years of my adult life,

a saying that you all know well, and a saying that says it all ...

Happy are those who dream dreams, and are prepared to pay the price to make those dreams come true.

Our dream, MANA's dream, is for a society where Maori can stand tall, where te pani me te rawakore is just a line in a song, and where everyone can feel good about the contribution they can make as a citizen of Aotearoa.

When I first came to parliament my people brought me here.

Today I thank the MANA whanau for making the long journey to take me home. Your love and your support has sustained me through the darkest of days, and your joy and your happiness has been a constant source of strength. Long may it continue.

And finally, to my darling wife, thank you for just being you, and for always being there for me.

# National politics

## Employment Relations Amendment Bill a provocation of organised labour

By Vita Bryant (Fightback Poneke/Wellington).

As National began its third term of Government, almost foremost on its legislative agenda was the implementation of the Employment Relations Amendment Act, which became law in October.

This law is no more than a thinly-veiled attack on workers, unions and minimum labour standards, and contains a number of provisions that significantly undermine the employment security of the most vulnerable members of our workforce.

The first of these is the removal of an employer's obligation to conclude collective bargaining in good faith unless there is a genuine reason not to, instead allowing employers to declare that bargaining has reached a "stalemate" and to seek a determination from the Employment Relations Authority that the bargaining has been concluded. Even Peter Dunne, United Future MP and National Party sycophant, raised concerns that such a removal will allow employers to "go through the motions" of collective bargaining without any real intention to form an agreement. This provision discourages the formation of new collective agreements, and has a very real potential to allow employers to claw back the hard won gains fought for by unions through collective bargaining. Secondly, the Bill removes the provision that new employees are covered by any collective agreement already negotiated for their work for the first 30 days of their employment, a provision expressly designed to give new employees fewer rights than contained in the existing collective agreement, as well as making it more difficult for new employees to understand what is being offered by that collective agreement. Over time, a situa-

tion where new employees accept lesser conditions and wages than unionised employees performing the same work incentivises employers to a "race to the bottom" in terms of the wages and conditions offered to each new employee.

Further, the amendments allow employers to opt-out of multi-employer collective agreements where conditions and standards are uniform across workforces (for example DHBs or

**“ Pleading or appealing to National’s conscience will not stop these attacks. The power of unions and communities lies in taking collective action. Strikes hit union-busting governments and employers the hardest, and wider community mobilisation can also support unions.**

franchises), removes employees' rights to scheduled rest and meal breaks, and imposes restrictions on the right to strike, including allowing employers the ability to deduct pay for even small industrial actions. Finally, the Bill removes protections for vulnerable workers in workplaces where the employer frequently changes hands.

Contrary to the National Party's view that the amendments merely provide 'clarification' and extend flexibility, the changes are in fact an effort to claw back workers' few remaining rights. Both the Human Rights Commission/Te Kahui Tika Tangata and the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions /Te Kauae Kaimahi have submitted that the Bill contravenes New Zealand's international obligations to protect minimum employment standards and promote collective bargaining, putting us in a similarly embarrassing situation as when we became an international laughing stock with the passing of the Employment Contracts Act 1991.

Such a blatant disregard for international law highlights the true agenda of the recently re-elected National Party Government – union busting and the unapologetic erosion of our most basic labour rights. At a time when collective agreement coverage is at an all-time low (just 17.3% from 2005-2010), it is not merely scare-mongering to say that our Government wants to kill collective bargaining once and for all.

Pleading or appealing to National's conscience will not stop these attacks. The power of unions and communities lies in taking collective action. Strikes hit union-busting governments and employers the hardest, and wider community mobilisation can also support unions.



## Housing under neoliberalism

Joel Cosgrove (*Fightback/MANA Poneke*).

It is a generally acknowledged political fact that housing is unaffordable. Within the awkward blame shuffling and finger pointing, MANA's policy of building 10,000 well-built and insulated homes per year until demand for affordable housing was satisfied, was a good policy. The policy called for an expansion of state-housing. Yet the Internet MANA alliance also endorsed renting-to-own, a policy which maintains the need for private home ownership.

### The nature of private home ownership

Why do people want to rent-to-own? In part because, there is no surety now

in state housing tenancies, with the National government revoking the right to lifetime tenancies and the opposition Labour Party raising barely a whisper of opposition. The current alternatives to private home ownership are the vagaries and insecurity of private renting or the modern, run-down state housing ghettos, the product of the budget cutting and under-maintenance by both National and Labour governments over the past thirty years.

The collapse of state housing as a serious alternative to private rentals makes for grim reading. 3,700 of 68,460 current state houses are empty, with a majority ready to be immediately occupied.

The current situation has its origins in the massive attacks on workers conditions that were carried out in the early

90's. The CTU estimates that if pay rates had kept up with productivity rates, the average wage would be \$35.91 per hour as opposed to the \$28.20 currently, a gap of over 20%.

Alongside attacks on wages and benefits was a massive escalation of house prices and housing-based debt. According to the Reserve Bank, household debt has increased from around 60% of disposable income, to around 144%. Around 97% of that debt is in housing.

To a certain extent, as long as you were able to maintain ownership of a house, you could leverage the increasing value of housing (which is now 75% above its historical value), swimming on debt in the assumption that capital gains from the sale of the house would bring a tidy profit. In Auckland alone, average house



# Housing

prices have risen from \$340,000 in 2004 to over \$700,000 in 2014. Those with houses have profited mightily. Those without have had to weather continual rent increases.

With average national house prices having risen by over \$30,000, and average wages by only \$1500, the gap between those who own houses and those who don't is only increasing. The Dominion Post reported in August this year that investors who already own ten properties or more brought two out of every five homes on the market.

That the overwhelming amount of household debt is property-based further demonstrates the divide – those with property have potential access to hundreds of thousands, while those without are left with credit cards, overdrafts and loan sharks.

Rising middle-class living standards are increasingly tied to atomised individual asset ownership, as opposed to a collective process of winning wage increases in worksites. This is a departure from the historical period of Fordism, with large industrial worksites, with relatively clear identity, tied in part to collective work.

While speculation on properties increases, and rents increase, rents are (relatively) constrained by wage growth. This leaves a yawning gap between the going price of a property and what can be charged in rent for it.

We live in a country of abysmal housing, with the recent Housing Warrant of Fitness survey finding that 94% failed on at least one of 31 criteria that they were judged across. Criteria included weather-tightness, insulation and ventilation, lighting, heating, condition of appliances and general building safety. Yet the system of housing speculation specifically pushes people to provide the bare minimum to maintain their properties, as the point of houses is not primarily to be lived in, but to appreciate in value and make money for the owner.

## Social base of the National Party

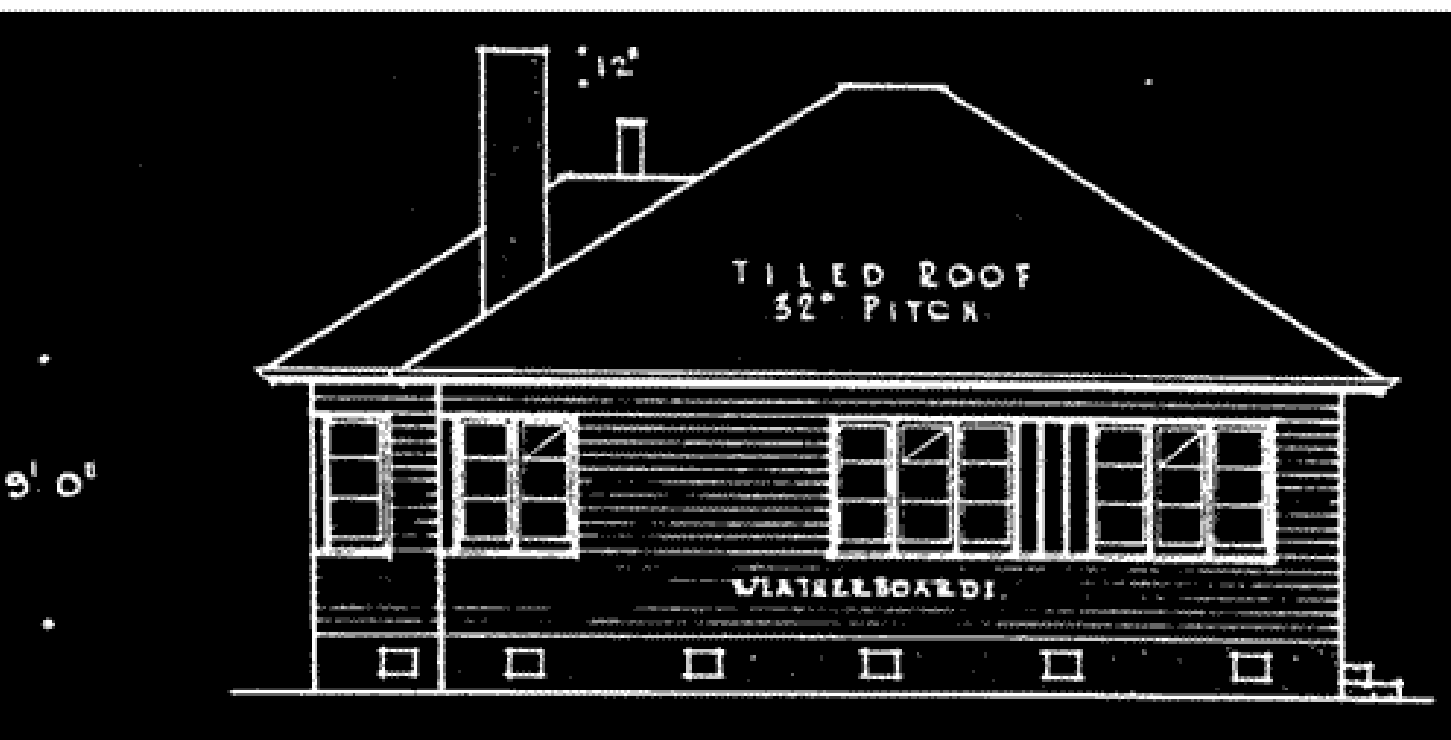
There was a lot of (important) talk of the missing million at the most recent election; non-voters uninspired by the options on offer, largely the most poor and marginal. Another million is also

important, namely the million who have voted for the National Party over the past three elections.

National is favoured by business, however this is not the whole story. 97% of the 112 chief executives who responded to a NZ Herald 'Mood of the Boardroom' 2014 survey indicating support for National leader John Key, however that only accounts for 108 votes all told.

Debt encumbered home owners, although being rich on paper, are nonetheless in a precarious position – one needs only to look at the sudden fall of Terry Serepisos – and this ties them to the status quo. This is a nuanced form of social pacification that binds people to a capitalist hegemony. [1]

Building state houses, until demand for affordable and safe housing is met, would cut at the base of a significant part of New Zealand society. Currently there are over 570,000 homes rented out, according to Statistics NZ. This is a question of billions of dollars in yearly rents and hundreds of billions in speculative value. The National Party allays the anxieties of a middle-class operating on a speculative bubble.



While relatively simple, the original state houses were practical buildings built en masse to provide an acceptable standard of living for all.

# Housing/National politics

## Fighting for public housing

In seeking to reverse the upward redistribution of wealth, we call for more and better state houses.

A serious public-housing building programme would make a major difference to the overcrowding and poverty-related illnesses that currently exist within New Zealand. It would also undercut the dependence on speculation as a basis for

security.

On one hand, there is something to be said for satisfying people's desire for security in housing. On the other hand, by upholding private housing, there is a danger that those trying to challenge the situation end up being absorbed into the status quo. We must be clear about the need for a public, collective solution to the housing crisis.

Whatever private home ownership

might have meant in the 70's, it increasingly serves class stratification. Those with access to property profit from those without.

The human need for shelter plays only a secondary role at best in this dynamic.

*[1] 'Hegemony' refers to a situation where an oppressive social system is so entrenched that many consent to it, not requiring direct violent coercion.*



Many state houses like this one in Porirua lie empty while many sit endlessly on waiting lists.

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## Moves to gut public and Maori broadcasting

Ian Anderson (Fightback/MANA Poneke).

Paora Maxwell's tenure as Maori TV CEO has been controversial. In August 2013, staff at Maori TV circulated a petition against Maxwell's appointment by the National government. More recently, Maxwell announced a restructuring process, and high-profile figures including Carol Hirschfeld left Maori TV. Now, plans to outsource TVNZ's Maori and Pacific programming appear to confirm rumours of continued back-door privatisation.

Maori TV remains the only TV broadcaster with content not dependant

on advertising revenue, while TVNZ is now commercially funded. Public broadcasting enables journalism such as last year's documentary *He Toki Huna - New Zealand In Afghanistan*, commissioned and broadcast by Maori TV, which investigated New Zealand troops' complicity in US occupation. Coupled with raids on independent journalist Nicky Hager's house, and Maxwell's banning of Hone Harawira from Marae Investigates, moves to gut Maori programming limit the capacity for critical journalism.

In an era of privatisation and neoliberal entrenchment, an era of Whale Oil and Kiwiblog, Maori TV's continued exist-

ence is a tribute to decades of Maori struggle and organisation. At the same time, the complicity of the Maori Party in these changes reveals how a top layer of Maori have been co-opted into a system that dispossesses the majority. With Hone Harawira booted out of his Te Tai Tokerau seat, the only serious public opposition to these moves has come from outside parliament. The struggle against neoliberal entrenchment, for a truly democratic society, is necessarily a community struggle. In addition to public broadcasting, we also need a people's press, sources independent of capital and the state that aid struggles for self-determination.

# Imperialism



## Why workers need our own “foreign policy” based on solidarity

*Mike Treen (UNITE Union Secretary)  
Reprinted from UNITE and the Daily Blog.  
The views expressed are his own and not  
necessarily those of UNITE.*

Working people in the advanced capitalist world should reject appeals by the rulers of their countries to support the foreign policy of “their” country.

Inevitably that foreign policy is simply a programme to advance the interests of the super-wealthy owners of industry and services to grab the biggest possible share of the wealth available on the world market. They disguise their naked self-interest with appeals to the so-called “national interest” with claims that we are fighting for lofty goals like “freedom and democracy”. We are even asked to wage war for these goals. Often it is the working people on both sides of these wars who are being shafted or

killed. But inevitably a few years down the line we discover that it was all lies.

I want to touch on a few of these wars from my lifetime and the lies told to support them.

The New Zealand Army participated in the Vietnam War from 1965 to 1972, when the troops were withdrawn by the newly elected Labour government under Norm Kirk. The previous National Party Prime Minister Keith Holyoake had declared: “Whose will is to prevail in South Vietnam? The imposed will of the North Vietnamese communists and their agents, or the freely expressed will of the people of South Vietnam?” Every word was a lie. It was widely accepted that if the elections promised at the 1954 peace conference had been held the Viet Minh forces led by Ho Chi Minh would have won easily. Instead the US installed a puppet dictatorship

of extreme brutality in the South. Twenty years later the US was forced to leave Vietnam, the southern dictatorship soon collapsed and the country was reunified. But Vietnam had suffered several million deaths and a legacy of destruction they still are recovering from today. The US lost 58,000 troops. NZ lost 38. Every one of those killed was murdered in defence of a world capitalist empire.

In 1975 the Indonesian military regime invaded Timor and annexed the territory. The action was taken with the support of NZ, Australia, and the US. What the imperialist West feared was that the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (Fretilin) would create what was dubbed “another Cuba” in the Pacific. Ten years earlier this same military regime in Indonesia (again with the support of Australia, NZ, and the US) slaughtered a half million of their own citizens to remove a national-



ist left-wing government. While the UN passed a resolution deploring the invasion of Timor no action was taken. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the US ambassador to the UN at the time, wrote in his autobiography that “the United States wished things to turn out as they did, and worked to bring this about. The Department of State desired that the United Nations prove utterly ineffective in whatever measures it undertook [with regard to the invasion of East Timor]. This task was given to me, and I carried it forward with not inconsiderable success.” Later, Moynihan admitted that, as US ambassador to the UN, he had defended a “shameless” Cold War policy toward East Timor. A quarter century and several hundred thousand dead later Indonesia was forced to withdraw and Fretilin won the subsequent election. That has not stopped Australia in particular from trying to bully tiny Timor out of access to oil and other resources off its coast.

In December 1978 the Vietnamese government intervened militarily to remove the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime from power in Cambodia. This was a very popular move inside the country. Cambodian forces opposed to the Khmer Rouge supported the Vietnamese action and a Cambodian run government was established. Vietnam was met by extreme hostility by the imperialist West, which imposed a brutal economic blockade on both Cambodia and Vietnam. China, the US, Australia, the UK and NZ supported the Khmer Rouge keeping their diplomatic seats in the United Nations, and claiming to represent the victims of their genocide, for another 15 years after their overthrow. In addition they allowed the Khmer Rouge to take control of refugee camps in Thailand and military and financial aid poured into their coffers to use for attacks on Cambodia and Vietnam. Hundreds of thousands of people starved to death as a consequence.

In 1975 a conservative monarchy was overthrown in Afghanistan by forces

## Why you should get involved in Fightback

### We oppose imperialism

The fight against imperialism is a vital part of the fight against capitalism. Imperialism is the system whereby rich countries dominate poor ones. New Zealand is a junior partner in the world imperialist system. The Workers Party opposes any involvement in imperialist wars such as those being fought in Afghanistan and Iraq, even

if the involvement is under the banner of so-called “peace-keeping”. We demand an immediate end to the interference in the affairs of Pacific Island nations by New Zealand and its ally Australia. We want an end to all involvement in imperialist military alliances and the dismantling of their spy bases.

### We fight oppression

We are serious about actively fighting oppression based on nation, race, gender or sexuality – here and now, not just “after the revolution”. But we believe class is central to all such oppression, and therefore those struggles are linked to the broader class

struggle. We support militant direct action by Maori for real equality; conversely, we see the Treaty process as a bureaucratic means to undercut such resistance and nurture a Maori middle class which will benefit very few.

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# Imperialism

associated with the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). It was an urban based party with broad support in the middle classes and professional layers. It was also deeply influenced by an authoritarian and bureaucratic approach to politics from its association with Soviet-style Stalinism. Many of its leading cadre had also been trained as engineers and military officers in the Soviet Union under the monarchy. The programme of the government was however very popular, especially in the cities, and included expanded rights for workers, women, and peasants.

Very soon a rural-based war was sponsored by the US and the right-wing military regime in Pakistan against the regime. The conservative tribal leaders (who also doubled as the rural gentry) feared the land reforms and abolition of usury. They used the proposed education of girls to mobilise opposition to the "atheist" regime in Kabul. The Kabul regime in turn responded in increasingly brutal manner to force the policy changes down the population's throat.

Billions of dollars in aid flowed from the US through Saudi Arabia and Pakistan into the hands of the Mujahideen. They were dubbed "Freedom Fighters"

by US President Reagan.

According to Liveleak (<http://www.liveleak.com>) "The Mujahideen consisted of at least seven factions, who often fought amongst themselves in their battle for territory and control of the opium trade. To hurt the Russians, the U.S. deliberately chose to give the most support to the most extreme groups. A disproportionate share of U.S. arms went to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, "a particularly fanatical fundamentalist and woman-hater." According to journalist Tim Weiner, "[Hekmatyar's] followers first gained attention by throwing acid in the faces of women who refused to wear the veil. CIA and State Department officials I have spoken with call him 'scary,' 'vicious,' 'a fascist,' 'definite dictatorship material.'

"There was, though, a kind of method in the madness: [US National Security advisor Zbigniew] Brezinski hoped not just to drive the Russians out of Afghanistan, but to ferment unrest within the Soviet Union itself. His plan, says author Dilip Hiro, was "to export a composite ideology of nationalism and Islam to the Muslim-majority

Central Asian states and Soviet Republics with a view to destroying the Soviet order." Looking back in 1998, Brezinski had no regrets. "What was more important in the world view of history? ... A few stirred-up Muslims or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the Cold War".

Tens of thousands of foreign fighters were recruited and got their baptism of fire in Afghanistan including the most famous "freedom fighter" Osama Bin Laden. In 1992, the Mujahideen drove the Soviets out and seized power themselves. However they soon fell into a fratricidal civil war that killed tens of thousands more Afghans. The Taliban then ousted the Mujahideen faction in power in 1994.

The Taliban were ousted in turn in 2001 by US-led forces installing other factions from the old Mujahideen based in the north of the country. New Zealand has supported the military occupation since then and actively participated at times. All of the governments in Afghanistan since the US-led occupation are reactionary warlords, drug dealing despots and murderers. The current vice-president General Dostum



The New Zealand military deployments have been a part of the US led imperialist coalition since the Iraq war

# Imperialism/International

earned notoriety for suffocating several thousand Taliban prisoners in shipping containers during the final offensive against them.

The lies associated with the Iraq wars are more well documented. NZ also played a more limited role. However the NZ government did support the criminal sanctions regime against Iraq between Gulf War One in 1990 and Gulf War Two in 2003. This led two leading UN officials who had been placed in charge of the sanctions to resign as it was obvious that hundreds of thousands of people were killed as a consequence. On May 12, 1996, Madeleine Albright (then U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations) appeared on a 60 Minutes segment in which Lesley Stahl asked her: “We have heard that half a million children have died. I mean, that’s more children than died in Hiroshima. And, you know, is the price worth it?” Albright replied “We think the price is worth it.”

While not part of the invasion force in 2003, Helen Clark’s Labour-led government did send a unit of military engineers to assist the occupation forces in 2004 because otherwise Fonterra would miss out on lucrative oil for food contracts. The morality of the occupation was no different to that of the invasion so the culpability remains.

We should remain very suspicious of any claims the US has that their promo-

tion of renewed military intervention in the Middle East has nothing to do with naked self-interest. Oil and the control of where it is extracted remains a geo-strategic objective of immense value. Preventing the people of Syria and Iraq from exercising any notion of genuine self-determination or democracy is part of that reality.

The Kurdish people in Syria and Turkey (or Iraq and Iran for that matter) are not considered allies of the US and its allies because they desire a genuine social revolution that will liberate their people from being divided up and exploited. The Kurdistan Workers Party has mass support in Turkey and Syria. That party has led the resistance in Kobane to the ISIS attacks. Turkey has killed more Kurds in Turkey this past week than ISIS fighters in Syria. On the BBC tonight I heard a Kurd who lives in Turkey declare “We don’t need your support, or your weapons, we just need you to stop supporting ISIS”. NZ, Australia, The UK and The US have all listed the PKK as a terrorist organisation because it also fights the reactionary Turkish regime (and NATO ally).

ISIS is a product of the attempt over three years to overthrow an autocratic, nationalist regime in Syria that won’t bow down completely before the US Empire or Israel. Billions of dollars in arms and fighters have poured across the border since the revolt began against

the Assad regime in 2011. The most reactionary gulf states (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait) funded like-minded individuals and groups. Turkey opened its borders to foreign fighters and promoted their own groups. No one cared if fighters went from the UK, Australia or NZ. The main allies that the imperialists and their local allies are able to find in their fight against these increasingly unpopular governments were often the most reactionary and gangster-like tribal leaders, warlords and businessmen.

But once you unleash reactionary forces like these, they can take on a life of their own that gets out of control. This is exactly what occurred in Afghanistan with the Taliban and Libya with the armed gangs vying for control of that country.

We must completely reject the propaganda of the empire. Our allies aren’t the US military or the local gangsters they support. Our allies are the genuine revolutionary fighters like those defending Kobane. They need support not from the US or Turkey who will only seek to dominate and betray them but from fellow revolutionary fighters in Syria, Iraq, Turkey and across the globe. Those fighters cannot be the ones who sell their souls to the empire but ones who want a genuinely progressive and democratic transformation of their country.

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## 10,000 Workers Strike in Support of Hong Kong’s Protests

*Michelle Chen (reprinted from The Nation.)*

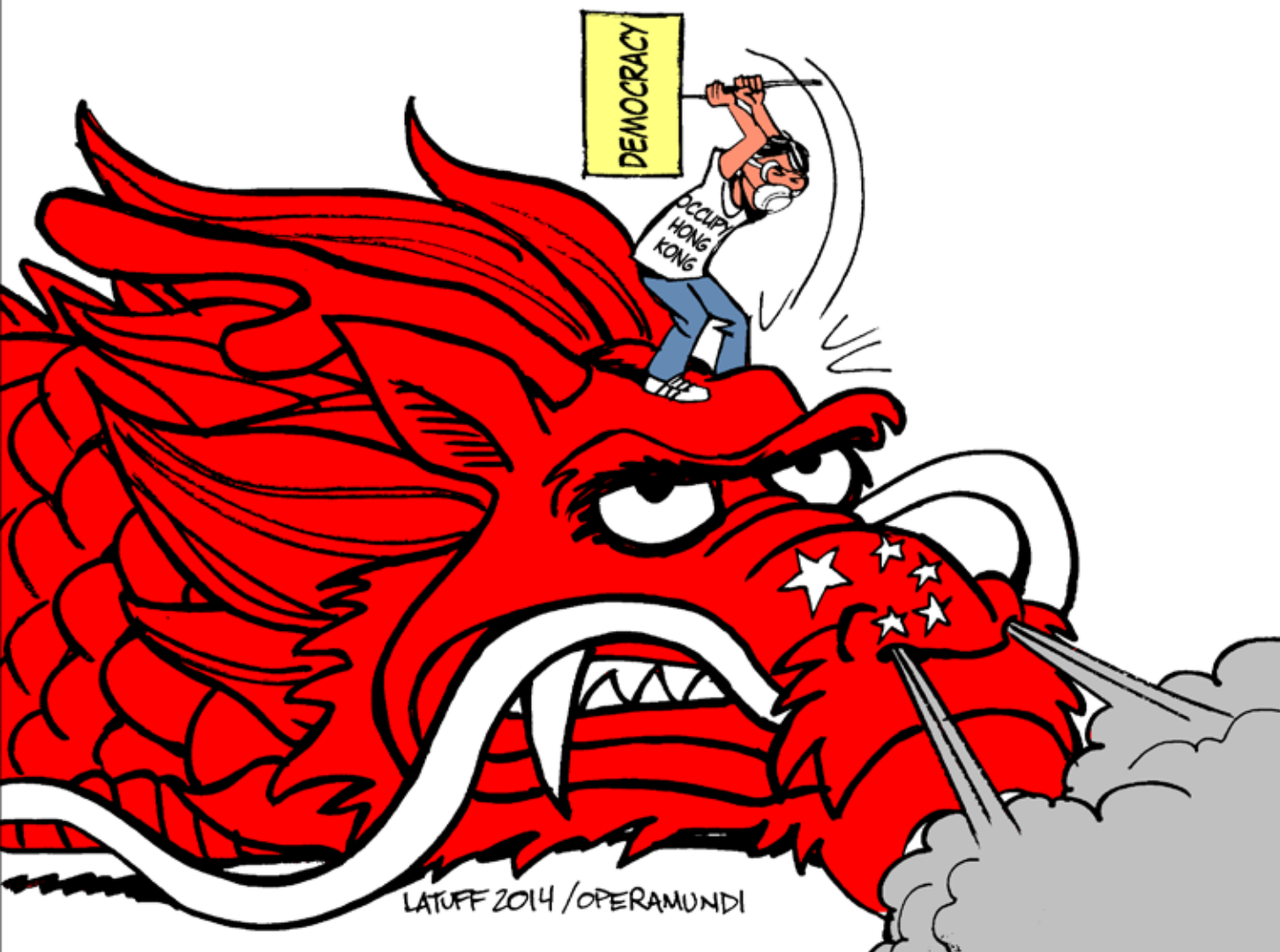
The umbrella is a perfect icon for Hong Kong’s uprising: inclusive, aloof, a bit Anglophile and pragmatically defiant of the elements (and according to cinematic lore, readily convertible to a lethal kung fu weapon). It embodies the

central plea of the protesters amassed in “Democracy Square”: a civilized demand for self-determination. Yet the biggest worry in Beijing right now isn’t the threat of universal suffrage, but what comes afterward—the struggle for social justice that Hong Kongers face as they pivot between post-colonial limbo and authoritarian capitalism.

That’s what the labour movement is taking to the streets with young protesters. The Equal Times reports that as of Wednesday—China’s National Day—“According to the latest HKCTU [Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions] figures, some 10,000 workers across all sectors have downed tools.” As unions representing industrial, service



# International



and professional workforces rallied alongside the youth and condemned police suppression of the demonstrators, Hong Kong labour echoed the former colony's long legacy of worker militancy. In a call for mass strikes, the HKCTU declared, "Workers must stand up against the unjust government and violent suppression.... To defend democracy and justice, we cannot let the students fight the suppression alone."

The immediate spark for the protests was the controversy over the electoral process. Activists were incensed that following Beijing's decree via the proxy authority National People's Congress, candidates for Hong Kong's 2017 executive election would be pre-approved by the mainland authorities.

But even prior to the electoral betrayal, students revolted against the imposition of Beijing-controlled nationalist

curricula on public schools. Longtime residents chafed at mainlanders' perceived aggressive economic encroachment on local neighborhoods and businesses. And even the symbols of the protest express a yearning for a change in the social and cultural reality, rather than just liberalizing political mechanics. Like the "Hands Up" iconography of the Ferguson protests, the sea of umbrellas exudes both civility and defiance in the face of brutality, not looking for trouble, just demanding dignity.

At the centre of their struggle for dignity is the desire to control their economic destiny. A statement issued last week by dozens of labour and community groups draws the link between unaccountable government and the divide between the plutocracy and the people:

has followed and reinforced almost every governing strategy used by the British colonialists. Working in tandem, the CCP and business conglomerates have only worsened Hong Kong's already alarming rich-poor gap. ...

It is true that even a genuinely democratic system may not be able to bring immediate improvements to grassroots and workers' livelihoods. However, the current political system and the NPC's ruling are flagrant violations of our political rights as well as our right to be heard. A pseudo-democratic system will only install even more obstacles on our already difficult path to better livelihoods and a progressive society.

The Chinese Communist Party

But the group's demands go beyond electoral freedom: it wants expanded

housing protections and welfare policies and a government that is responsive to the economic and social concerns raised by civil society groups. With this aspiration toward a fairer as well as freer society, according to City University of Hong Kong professor Toby Carroll, many leaders fear primarily that “people in Hong Kong will convert demands for increasing suffrage into robust demands for redistribution; that in the face of plenty, those with little or no positive prospects won’t stand for obscenely concentrated wealth, power and privilege anymore.”

As Eli Friedman points out, Hong Kong is both an amazingly sophisticated and intensely unequal economy, compared to other “developed” nations. One-fifth of the population lives in poverty. The minimum wage, just recently implemented at the rate of US \$3.60, hardly offsets the astronomical costs of housing, inflation and unemployment. The former colonial trade hub has lost about 80 percent of its manufacturing jobs since the early 1990s, as industries have shifted to the mainland. The most impoverished are often migrant labourers, youths and women. The radicals at the core of #OccupyCentral represent

twenty-somethings who are tired of the volatility of the economy and the stagnation of the country’s political system. The latest uprising was portended last year when dockworkers staged a major strike to demand stable, fair working conditions. They galvanized international solidarity in criticizing multinational corporations’ degradation of global labour rights.

So far, Beijing shows no signs of heeding the demands for free elections or the resignation of mainland-aligned Chief Executive C.Y. Leung. Protesters are doubling down, too, heartened by a groundswell of international solidarity actions. And so the brittle “one country, two systems” policy is steadily unraveling. Not necessarily because Beijing has tried to impose its rule directly—for the most part, Hong Kongers enjoy infinitely more civil freedoms than their mainland counterparts—but because Hong Kong, on principle, just wants to be able to claim full freedom and self-rule for the first time in its modern history.

The voices of Hong Kong’s workers are instructive for international observers. It’s too easy to draw a simple parallel to

the Tiananmen Square pro-democracy protests. The idealism is there, but universal suffrage is a means to an end, the first step away from decades of being lorded over by reactionary ruling elites—one building block toward social democracy.

Sophia Chan, an activist with Left 21, tells *The Nation*, “We see free elections as a major blow to business-government collusion and capitalist privilege.” She emphasized that the current parliamentary government, dominated by business leaders, has been structured “to protect the interests of capitalists... although we do think that a democratic political system is only the first step to real change, we also think that that in itself would already be a huge improvement for our fight against capitalist oppression in Hong Kong.”

In 1997, Hong Kong was handed over by Britain to its “motherland,” the crown jewel of China’s new empire. But the deal turned out to be more than what Beijing had bargained for. The mainland regained a piece of territory, but it never conquered the hearts of a people who are ready for true decolonization and will settle for nothing less.



# International

## Fiji Election: Crooks in Suits

*Byron Clark (Fightback - Christchurch)*

On September 17 Fiji held its first election since Voreqe “Frank” Bainimarama seized power in a 2006 coup. With his Fiji First party receiving 59.2% of the vote, Bainimarama will remain in power. Aman Ravindra-Singh, a candidate for the People’s Democratic Party, took to social media in the following days to declare “It is business as usual with the same old crooks – this time they are in suits”.

A 3 News report the week of the election stated the election was “considered pivotal to ending the archipelago’s ‘coup culture’, which saw four governments toppled between 1987 and 2006 amid instability stemming from tensions between indigenous Fijians and ethnic Indians.”

This soundbite oversimplifies the history of Fiji. As a British colony, indentured servants were brought from India to work on sugar plantations, and in time equalled the indigenous population in number. The divide-and-rule system implemented by the British persisted following independence, with electorates for ethnic Fijians and electorates for Fijian Indians.

Electorates were not based on population, meaning people in densely populated areas (more likely to be Fijian Indian) had less representation in parliament than the rural electorates, more likely to be populated by ethnic Fijians.

‘Ethnic tensions’ does not tell the whole story. The coups in 1987 and 2000 were indeed led by men wanting to retain the political power of ethnic Fijians, but the governments they overthrew were led by the multi-ethnic Labour Party which had its base not in any one ethnic group but in Fiji’s working class, which had been instrumental in independence struggles with industrial action as a

tactic, and has retained its fighting spirit though the subsequent decades.

The Bainimarama coup was different in that he promised to reform the electoral system to end the ethnic division. The election was held with electorates of equal size under ‘Open List’, a form of proportional representation similar to the MMP system used in New Zealand, but giving voters some control over the order of candidates on party lists. As in New Zealand, parties had to cross a 5% threshold, disadvantaging small parties and independents.

During the eight years since the coup, the Bainimarama regime has attempted to crush the union movement, arresting organisers and strike leaders, and issuing decrees limiting the role of unions in political life. “The current decrees deny workers their most fundamental rights which are part of human rights, and attempt to decimate workers unions and all the gains that workers have made through decades of struggle,” wrote then Council of Trade Unions general secretary Felix Antony in February last year.

“Such onslaught by the regime and aided by some employers is unprecedented. The uncertain political climate is seen by some employers as an opportunity to turn the clock back on workers and their unions.”

Around the same time the FCTU ended its support for the Labour Party, which was seen at the time as becoming an Indian Party drawing most of its support from just one union. Support for the Labour Party has collapsed completely, from 39% of the vote in 2006 to just 2.6% this year. Unfortunately, the new party formed out of a mass meeting of union members, the People’s Democratic Party, didn’t do much better, gaining just 3.2% of the vote.

Anthony, who had left his FCTU role to lead the new party (a government decree meant union office holders could not stand as candidates) resigned from the party leadership saying he takes full responsibility for the party’s poor performance.

The main opposition is now the Social Democratic Liberal Party, a reformation of the Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua who were in government until the coup (the new party is known as ‘SODELPA’ rather than SDL because of a decree banning new parties using the same initials as old ones).

Fiji’s labour movement will continue to face challenges in the coming years, as Bainimarama continues his rule with a supposedly democratic mandate. The Multinational Observer Group (MOG) stated that the “casting and counting of votes” was fair and the election results “broadly represented the will of the people”, but as Wadan Narsey writing on Scoop pointed out:

“The good governance organisations know too well that elections are far more than just the “casting and counting” of votes, especially in a Fiji where draconian military decrees and total media control have restricted and shaped public opinion over the last eight years.

“Books will now be written about this second Fiji case study (the first being Rabuka) on how a military commander, treasonously deposed a lawfully elected government, and managed to become legitimised as an elected Prime Minister.”

The struggle for democracy in Fiji is far from over.





## Scotland's radical independence movement

*Daphne Lawless (Fightback, Auckland)*

A “Pyrrhic victory” is where one side wins a battle at such a cost that it goes on to lose the war. It looks like the victory of the “No” side in the referendum on Scottish independence on September 20 may go down as a clear historical example of these.

The referendum on “Should Scotland become an independent country?” was a primary historical demand of the Scottish National Party (SNP), which has formed a government in the Scottish Parliament since 2011. As it stands, Scotland’s Parliament is responsible for health, education and other local matters, but has no power over foreign policy or defence and only limited rights to raise its own taxes.

The SNP led the Yes campaign, with the support of the Scottish Greens and some socialist forces such as the Radical Independence Campaign (RIC). On the other side at the referendum were all

three traditional UK major parties – the governing coalition of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, and the opposition Labour Party.

The “No” campaign, under the name “Better Together”, was widely criticised for its patronising and fear-mongering approach, telling scare stories of massive job losses and Scotland being excluded from both the British pound and the euro. This almost backfired altogether, when in the last weeks of the campaign, polls showed “Yes” ahead by a tiny margin. This was an amazing return, when “No” was leading 65-35% back in 2012.

As it turned out, the “No” vote rallied to win by a margin of 55-45%. On the face of it, this looks reasonably comfortable. But most significant was the fact that, of all Scotland’s local councils, the only places where “Yes” won a majority were Glasgow and Dundee – the two councils with the highest levels of poverty and the longest history of working-class activism.

Triumphalist “pro-British” far-right

groups went on the rampage in Edinburgh after the “No” vote was announced. But the joy of the right wing was short lived. In the month since the vote, the membership of the SNP has tripled, to 75,000 members. The SNP are also riding high in the polls for both London and Scottish parliaments, with – crucially – the Labour Party vote having crashed. The government parties had to promise massively increased powers for Scotland’s Parliament (short of independence) to win back wavering voters in the last week of the campaign. Now they face a revolt against their promises from English backbenchers who oppose any concessions to nationalism.

The British Labour Party seems to be the biggest victim of the referendum. The Conservatives were almost wiped out in Scotland after the Thatcher years, and Scotland’s 59 MPs in the London parliament have since then gone overwhelmingly to Labour. One big fear among the Labour “No” campaign was that an independent Scotland would

# International

mean long-term Conservative dominance over a rump state of England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

But the referendum results and its aftermath clearly show that Labour made a possibly fatal error to team up with the parties of David Cameron's "austerity" government. The massive shift of support to "Yes" in the last few months of the campaign was not a surge in Scottish nationalism in itself. It was primarily a movement against the cuts agenda of the London government, and against the ability of English Tories to enforce a neoliberal agenda north of the border, which has repeatedly voted against it for 40 years.

Like their equivalents in Aotearoa/New Zealand, the British Labour Party has long ago given up offering a social democratic alternative, and simply strives to put a kinder face on neoliberalism and cuts. Standing with the Tories and LibDems under "Better Together"

showed that clearly to the Scottish electorate. On the other hand, the SNP's outgoing leader Alex Salmond steered them from traditional nationalism towards a social-democratic (though still business-friendly) position. Salmond's rhetoric on the campaign trail was of an independent Scotland developing a high-tech, high-waged, socially secure mixed economy like Sweden or Norway.

For the Scottish working class, the nationalists are increasingly speaking their language, which Labour seems to have forgotten. It is of course doubtful whether an SNP-led independent government in Edinburgh would have been prepared to make any serious break with globalized neoliberalism. For example, the SNP was careful to call for an independent Kingdom of Scotland under the British monarchy, rather than a republic.

But the results of the votes in Glasgow and Dundee make it clear that genera-

tions of massive majorities for Labour are on the verge of tipping towards the nationalists, who now speak the language of reformism. On current polls, the SNP might win a majority of Scottish seats at Westminster in the next election, wiping out Labour and being able to demand many more powers for Scotland, or even the beginning of a new independence process.

Meanwhile, the Radical Independence Campaign has decided to stick together in the aftermath of the referendum, building a clear socialist case for Scotland to decide its own future. They will be holding a conference. The split in the Scottish Socialist Party in 2006 between supporters and opponents of former leader Tommy Sheridan dashed what was the brightest hope for the revolutionary left in English-speaking countries. This might indicate a new beginning.



Even The Simpsons character Grounds Keeper Willie joined in with an online viral video in support of independence.

## Thousands march against climate change

*Bronwen Beechey (Fightback - Auckland)*

The largest demonstration to date against climate change was held in New York City on September 21. The march

was part of a global day of action held before a United Nations climate change summit in New York on September 23. Among the estimated 400,000 who attended were indigenous people from

the US, Canada and Latin America, students, unions and representatives of communities affected by fracking.

The marchers stopped for a moment of silence to honour those who have





already died around the world as a result of catastrophes linked to global warming. The entire crowd then erupted in a tremendous roar to literally sound the alarm, accompanied by the blaring instruments of the 26 marching bands that took part. It was directed at the heads of state and governments that have repeatedly failed to address the problem.

The march was initiated by 350.org and other groups on the activist wing of the environmental movement, but as the momentum grew, more conservative groups like the Sierra Club endorsed the march. The march was also built extensively through social media activist groups such as Avaaz and NZ's Action Station.

One of the groups in the US that initiated the march, and a central organising force, was System Change Not Climate Change (SCNCC). A coalition of socialist groups and individual radicals, SCNCC targets capitalism as the cause

of climate change, and advocates socialism as the only long-term solution. The role played by SCNCC in organising the march, and its acceptance as part of the broader environmental movement, marks an important step forward. The impact of the recession, the Occupy movement that targeted the wealthy "1%" and implicitly capitalism itself, and the obvious role of big corporations as destroyers of the environment, has made many realise that capitalism is to blame. According to US socialist Barry Shepherd, writing for the Australian left newspaper *Green Left Weekly*: "This was a truly grass-roots march, not a top-down affair. The march organisers from different environmental groups encouraged everyone to bring their own banners and literature, and raise their own concerns. The result was that all aspects of the problem of climate change were expressed."

The day after the march, around 1000 people took part in a sit-in in Wall

Street that was explicitly anti-capitalist. The action was called "Flood Wall Street", referring to the flooding of the area that happened following Hurricane Sandy last year. Around 100 people, including one dressed in a polar bear suit and three in wheelchairs, were arrested after blockading the street for eight hours.

Solidarity actions also took place in other cities in the US, and around the world, with an estimated 40,000 in London and 30,000 in Melbourne. In Auckland, several hundred people turned out despite miserable weather and the disappointment of the previous day's election result.

Unsurprisingly, the UN summit produced little in the way of any action on climate change. However, the numbers protesting shows that more and more ordinary people are prepared to act, and that many are recognising that stopping climate change will mean changing the system.



# Poetry

By Sionainn Byrnes

# Body Politics

What am I? On A3 sheets of recycled pulp mashed new

Furry ended felts and snapped crayons strewn across the room

I am opportunity, I am hope, I am green ribbons in auburn pigtailed

I am marital glue – pasty, gelatinous, salty

I am a human born of expectations failed and fresh

I am what hurting people produce in the temporary solace of their shared dysfunction

I am the love child of belts on skin, welts on skin, wounds melting when skins are shared

Unbeknownst to me I am ‘working class’

I am of terrorist descent

A portent of my danger in years to come

My shrapnel bombs now stained by menses

I am the red scare

And yet if I were a man, I would be more Irish that I am

Because strong men in Belfast – who share my blood – don’t mix real politics with feminism

Don’t take notes from insular girls who live a world away from reality

Green ribbons don’t make you one of us

And what’s this whakapapa you mention?

I hope you know that’s illegal here – cue laughs –

Plus we only speak Gaelic

And somehow I’m the hick?

Because I tried to speak in the language of your own politics

Lesson learnt: don’t try to make struggles and troubles equal

But I am still S – I – O – N – A – I – N – N,  
Sionainn to you

I am Gaelic on recycled pulp mashed new

True, that in New Zealand I have settled felt-like upon that paper with privilege

Even though spelling errors on official documents erase a part of me I am nonetheless lucky that my face matches the papyry palette of power

White craft materials affirm me while sing-song lilt denounce my green ribbons, my lack of sexual inhibitions, my stories that stain the blanket men in ways they never experienced in Long Kesh

I dive into murals, into barbed wire, into taxi drivers who seem only to know the directions to Shankill Road, into the bed of my cousin’s friend Cormac

In order to make whakapapa relevant to me, to them

In order to retrieve something that was lost in emigration

In order to settle the fuck a niece that ensured my mother would never return to Ireland, and which is apparently not illegal

My green ribbons, tied to my lack of sexual inhibitions, tied to my ideological positions

Fuck a niece informed my femininity

To my uncles I say: that’s what I mean by intersectionality

That’s what the return line from Christchurch to Singapore to Frankfurt to Dublin to Belfast means

As a side note I am constantly referred to as Siobhan because it is more recognizable than Sionainn

My mother is Siobhan

I am my mother, and all of her baggage

I am lost in transit

I am running out of room for presents

It occurs to me that I was a child when this began

I was opportunity, I was hope, I was green ribbons in auburn pigtailed

What am I? On a pixelated screen some twenty years later

I am a well-read Frankenstina

I am a work in progress, regress, progress, regress

Future, past, Sionainn, Siobhan

Brick by brick by bricolage

Still pasty, glutinous, and salty, though, my glue, my mashed potato mortar, has not yet dried

I am a body politic and a voice worth hearing in the right context, but one that is trying to learn its place and its limitations